

What Those MSF Classes Don't Teach You

Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) classes must teach an enormous number of facts and skills to people who are assumed to have no experience whatever with motorcycles in a short two day period (my hat is off to these folks). As such, they do not have time to teach the kinds of things that can and will happen on the streets, highways and byways. Insufficient time is available to emphasize or even touch on these various scenarios to the extent that they should. Least anybody gets the wrong idea, the following tips are not meant to be antagonistic towards the MSF nor of its teachings - I am one of the strongest advocates of MSF training to be found anywhere. But these are some food for thought that I would like to pass along to new riders in our chapter, and to experienced riders for that matter as well.

1. When riding alone or in the lead of a group, as you approach the crest of a hill move slightly away from the center line of the road. By the time oncoming traffic is visible it may be too late to move out of the way enough should you find someone coming at you in your lane if you have not already bought some air-space. Actually this is one taught in the MSF class, I just mentioned it for emphasis.

2. One lesson that MSF teaches strongly, but does not quite clarify correctly, is to always stop with one foot on the ground, or at least they did when I went through the course. While this may be the ticket riding one of those little lightweight Honda 250's or other lightweight Harley's, it is not such a good idea while on one of the touring bikes or any other bike with more weight than those little scoots! Slick spots or gravel can be quite unforgiving and dangerous. Both feet should really be used when coming to and after a stop on a heavier bike in order to stabilize it as safely as possible.

3. Another lesson that is not quite emphasized enough is the fact that you need to use more than your mirrors when changing lanes or turning. Sure, your mirrors can tell you what is there in their line of sight but you really need to do that "head turn" to really "see" where you are going. The MSF courses do teach the head turn in the basic and experienced riders courses but do not stress it enough. Golden rule – look to where you are going to live, not where you are going to crash!!

4. These "head checks" are **extremely important** when coming off the highway onto an exit ramp. Head check to the right to "be sure" you are clear. Just as well for highway entrance ramps, do the "head check" to the left to be sure some motorist is not trying to beat you to that spot in the lane. Cagers are prone to compete with bikes for any spot in the road, just their nature and since they are bigger than you, this is a no-win situation so don't compete, just give way!

5. Another tactic MSF teaches you in the basic course is to always cover the front brake lever with your hand. While this may be something of value to MSF instruction, I find it a bad habit to teach inexperienced riders as they may tend to grab the front brake lever too much when stopping out of nervous reaction. Actually both brakes should be used together to effect a smooth, controlled stop, especially on a touring bike. MSF also teaches that your front brake is 70% of your stopping power, while actually it has been proven that your front brake can be 100% of your stopping power and in most cases at least 90% of your stopping power.

6. And one last thing, MSF touches on but does not stress, I would assume because of political correctness and not wanting to rub someone the wrong way, the use of alcohol while riding. This subject, to this individual and safety officer for a few years now, is of high importance. If you like to partake of the alcohol spirits, then please, for your own sake as well as possible passengers and others around you, **DON'T** while on your bike! Alcohol, in any form or amount is three times the killer on a motorcycle as compared to a four wheel motor vehicle and this is a proven fact due mainly to the aspect of balance. So for your own sake and the concern of your fellow riders and friends, it is recommended that you refrain from alcohol drink when riding, especially when on organized ride events. This tip is purely a safety suggestion from your Safety Officer and is in no way intended to state the policy of the VFW Riders.

Anyway, just a few things to think about when you are out and about enjoying the thrill of motorcycling. Riding a bike is a lot of fun but also has a lot more responsibility that driving an automobile. Keep that in mind and you should come home safe from all your rides.

Ride Safe and Have Fun

Don Light, aka Tex

VFW Riders Safety Officer